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Schools, libraries and other experts help CMS chart future direction of ICN

The State's innovative and award-winning communications backbone – the Illinois Century Network (ICN) – has doubled in size since its inception in 1999, making it the largest statewide Information Technology network in the nation.

Over the last four years, CMS has:

- Upgraded the ICN while continuing to provide multicast services, deliver access to the resource-rich Internet2 network – and maintain 99%+ reliability.
- Migrated State agencies' data traffic onto the network, saving the State an estimated \$7 million per year and leading to a Computerworld Honors Laureate medal.
- Improved master contract pricing – and delivered higher speeds at lower prices.

Now an alliance of experts has laid out a vision to keep up with technology to take the network's capabilities to the next level.

Over the past year, the team (primarily the ICN Planning Committee, aided by engineering taskforces and staff of the CMS Bureau of Communication and Computer Services) conducted extensive outreach including surveys and focus groups. The initial findings of this outreach – that many network users needed more bandwidth at lower costs to achieve greater connectivity and growth – led CMS to slash prices and increase speed and bandwidth for ICN users last fall.

Specifically, CMS upgraded the ICN with carrier-class routers, aggressively renegotiated contracts and increased bandwidth to accommodate increased traffic and enable next-generation applications – and provide better service at better prices.

As a result, the ICN now provides higher speeds, more bandwidth and lower costs to 8,000 schools, universities, hospitals, libraries and other institutions statewide – and, consequently, the estimated 2 million citizens who use it. The upgraded network offers Internet service that is thousands of times faster than dial-up and up to three times faster than most at-home services.

The yearlong planning effort also helped charter the course for the future direction of the ICN. To help lead the ICN into the future, the expert team created a strategic plan, recently detailed in the report, "Illinois: The Next Century Network". Their goals are to eliminate the digital divide, help the State's diverse constituents share vital information resources, and take advantage of advances in technology to improve research and collaboration.

CMS believes this detailed and far-sighted plan will help establish the framework to ensure that the citizens of Illinois, regardless of where they live in the state, continue to have high-speed and cost-effective access to a high-performance, resource-rich – indeed, world-class – network.

"We're very happy to have the increase in bandwidth. Our upgraded circuit was recently installed and we look forward to increased access to rich media instructional content from Illinois universities, libraries and museums."

– Jim Flanagan,
Director of Technology,
Maine Township High
School District #207, and
Chair, ICN Advanced
Engineering Task Force

Librarians, professors and other users of the State's upgraded high-speed IT backbone help experts plan to keep the ICN at a world-class level

"The additional bandwidth will allow teachers and students to take advantage of the growing amount of online educational content to enhance learning."

– Dennis Gallo,
District Technology
Coordinator, O'Fallon
School District #90